

Facing the expiration of these payments this year, rural counties have been forced to begin laying off teachers, librarians, and county employees that provide critical services.

And these communities cannot absorb the loss of these workers. Nor should they have to deal with further erosion of the sense of community that many of their towns were founded on.

But today we are reversing this trend and helping counties retain county employees and teachers, keep roads safe and maintained, stemming cuts in vital government services, while also providing funding for resource conservation projects, forest service land rescue services, and programs to support economic development.

This bill not only provides new opportunities for American businesses to take advantage of the growing green energy economy, but it provides real opportunities for Americans to save real dollars.

So today I ask my colleagues to join me in voting for a strong, bipartisan tax package that helps move this country forward toward greater energy independence and provides needed tax relief to our families and businesses.

I would also like to take a moment to recognize the mental illness parity provisions in this bill. What they mean is that when Americans need mental health treatment that they will not be faced with higher costs for that treatment than they currently have for medical surgical treatments. This bill would require private insurance plans that offer mental health benefits as part of the coverage to offer such benefits on par with the medical surgical benefits. Any cost-sharing or benefit limits imposed on mental health services must not be any more restrictive than those imposed on medical surgical services.

Your support on all of these provisions cannot wait any longer. We have run out of time, and the time to act is now.

I thank the Presiding Officer and yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

ORDER OF BUSINESS

Mr. REID. Mr. President, for the information of Senators, we are trying to work things out here. It has been very difficult. At this stage, it appears that the vote on cloture on the Coburn package will be vitiated. We will not have that vote tonight or in the morning.

We are now waiting to see if we can work out an agreement on the extenders. This has been something that the

chairman of the committee has worked on all day, and it has been very difficult. We thought we had it worked out on a couple different occasions, and we did not. We now are told that one Senator who had a problem with it is reading the new language. We hope that can be done fairly quickly. That being the case, we will be back and report to the Senate again, hopefully in the next half hour or so.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

TAX EXTENDERS AND DISASTER RELIEF

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, earlier the majority leader came to the floor and propounded a unanimous consent request on the tax extenders package, and I told him that while I supported the legislation, there are a lot of good things in the bill, I still had some concerns about the disparate treatment of the State of Texas, especially related to Hurricane Ike.

I am pleased to report that as a result of discussions with the Finance Committee—Senator GRASSLEY, Senator BAUCUS, and their staff—I believe we have achieved our goal of getting fair treatment for the State and the victims of Hurricane Ike. I wanted to come to the floor and express my gratitude to Senator BAUCUS and Senator GRASSLEY. We are reviewing the final language, but subject to that, I think, as far as I am concerned, there is no objection to proceeding to the bill.

As I toured the hurricane-damaged area last weekend—

Mr. BAUCUS. Mr. President, if the Senator would briefly pause, I wish to thank the Senator from Texas. The Senator has been great to work with as we worked out some provisions to help that State, especially the Galveston area, and the coastal States in getting additional disaster assistance. I thank the Senator as well as his colleague from Texas. We will come back to do more at a later date, but we are doing what we can on this bill, and I say thanks to my colleague for working so well with us.

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, I appreciate the generous comments of the distinguished chairman of the Finance Committee. I especially enjoyed the part where he said we may come back later for more once we have been able to do further assessments. That is an important part of the rationale for agreement on this bill. We understand we can't do everything that needs to be done in this bill because the hurricane only hit this last weekend. There are a lot of people who have yet to be able to get back to their homes, a lot of folks

without power, a lot of damage that is ongoing that cannot be fully calculated.

I had the chance, when traveling around the damaged area, to witness the destructive capacity of this huge hurricane and hear from a lot of my constituents, a lot of displaced Texans who were trying to find the necessities of life, including food, water, and shelter. Of course, they were very anxious to know about their homes, whether they would be able to return home, when they would be able to return home, and what they would find when they got there.

I appreciate that the chairman of the Finance Committee has included in the extenders package things such as bonus depreciation and expensing. These may seem like arcane subjects, but they actually mean a lot. They will mean a lot to the people of my State when it comes to rebuilding and getting back on their feet and getting back to work.

I understand the unique circumstances we find ourselves in and the need to get the extenders package passed, which, as I said earlier, I support. I offer my congratulations to Senator CANTWELL, who is on the floor, and Senator ENSIGN for their leadership. They have been working hard and long at trying to get this done, and I know we are almost over the goal line.

Included in the package is an extension of the State and local sales tax deduction. This is something that is important to my State and to the other States that do not have an income tax. Because, of course, you can deduct your Federal income tax from your—or your State income tax from your Federal income tax, but if you don't have a State income tax, as Texas does not and, I might add, never will, this provides a level playing field by allowing the deduction of State and local tax.

This also includes an extension of the very important research and development tax credit which helps many companies in Texas and around the country be competitive in the globalized economy.

This measure also includes the extension of several renewable energy tax credits that have helped grow the Texas renewable energy industry. I know my colleagues get a little tired of Texans always bragging about Texas, but I am not going to stop now. We are No. 1 in the production of electricity from wind energy. Many people think of Texas as an oil and gas State, and we are that, but we are much more. We are an energy State. Credits for wind, solar, geothermal, biomass, hydropower, clean renewable energy bonds, fuel cell, and credits for residential energy efficiency home improvements are helping to diversify our Nation's energy portfolio and are a significant contribution toward answering the energy crisis we find ourselves in today.

This measure also supports the clean use of coal. Coal, of course, is cheap. It is domestic. We have a lot of it. We are sometimes called the Saudi Arabia of